

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee

From: Roberta J. Cook, President and CEO

Re: Appropriations Committee Budget Hearings: DMHAS

Date: February 18, 2016

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, I thank you for your consideration of my testimony. My name is Roberta Cook and I am the President and CEO of BHcare, one of six private nonprofits in CT dedicated to serving individuals with the most serious mental illnesses.

BHcare is designated by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) as the Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA) for towns in Greater New Haven, the Valley and the Shoreline. Each year BHcare provides mental health treatment for more than 3,500 Connecticut residents. These individuals are struggling with chronic disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and major depression. These illnesses are pervasive and if left untreated can lead to an increase in devastating symptoms, psychiatric crises, and result in public health and safety hazards.

I am writing today in response to Governor Malloy's proposed budget – specifically, the budget for DMHAS. I am strongly opposed to the continued cuts to grants for mental health and substance abuse services. Each year the executive branch claims that grants for behavioral health services are no longer necessary because Connecticut residents now have insurance through the Affordable Care Act and Access CT. The truth of the matter is, the ACA had almost no impact on our clients; in fact, we've only seen eight newly insured clients since its inception.

The proposed budget will force our State's six LMHA's to nearly eliminate outpatient behavioral health services; it will obliterate our mental health system. We feel the impact of these cuts each and every day in our communities. We've seen a nearly 30 percent increase in the number of people we serve over the last five years, as asked, we've managed to do more with less, but if this budget goes through, there is no doubt we will lose ground and our communities will suffer. Our outpatient services save lives, they prevent suicide, they give adults with serious mental illnesses the treatment, medication and supports they need to live safely and independently in the community. Our services are linguistically and culturally appropriate, we offer on-site clinical treatment in Spanish. If this budget goes through, we will be forced to cut 50 staff positions and eliminate services for 2,000 people.

This budget will leave thousands of our most seriously ill without proper medication and treatment. It will drive the State into a mental health emergency- one that will cost significantly more than the outpatient services previously funded by grant dollars. Without accessible outpatient mental health services the State will see a sharp increase in the number of people accessing acute care and/or ending up in correctional facilities.

Right now the community provider system in CT is facing a \$408 million reduction over what was appropriated, that is a tidal wave of epic proportions, it will create a state of emergency and more than 75,000 Connecticut families will be the ones to suffer. If nothing is done to restore DMHAS grant funding, it will result in crisis, in loss, and in a significant financial and tragic burden for

Connecticut. My request to you is simple, restore DMHAS grant funding for behavioral health services.